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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/IPA (MAHER)
PENTAGON FOR OSD (JAMES ANDERSON)

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SUBJECT: ISRAELI PM'S MILITARY ADVISER REVIEWS REGION,
SITUATION WITH PALESTINIANS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Gene A. Cretz. Reasons: 1.4 (b, d).

SUMMARY

1. (S) Major General Gadi Shamni -- Israeli PM Sharon's military adviser -- told the Ambassador that the U.S. should continue to lead the international community to diplomatically pressure Iran to abandon its program. If a military solution were required, Shamni said he believes the U.S. could destroy Iran's nuclear weapons program in one strike lasting a few hours, as long as the U.S. has accurate intelligence on where various sites are located. On Israel's northern border, Shamni reiterated the GOI's current position that care should be taken not to push Lebanon or Syria too far, lest Syria strike back through Hizballah rocket attacks. Shamni said improved cooperation with Egypt along the Egypt-Gaza border is forcing terrorists to attempt to infiltrate Israel by sea, tunnels, and through the less-well-defended Israel-Egypt border. Shamni expressed concern that Gaza-based terrorists are trying to transfer know-how and technology to West Bank cells, enabling those cells to launch rockets against strategic targets in the heart of Israel. END SUMMARY.

ON IRAN: U.S. SHOULD CONTINUE TO EXERT DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE

2. (S) In their December 13 meeting, Shamni told the Ambassador that the best way to deal with Iran now is through diplomatic pressure. He urged the USG to continue its effort to mobilize stronger, more effective international pressure against Iran by drawing other countries into taking a position on the country's weapons program. Shamni said Israel is very worried about Iran, and claimed that Iran is accelerating its program and will soon reach the "point of no return." Without elaborating, he said that Israel began to worry about statements from USG officials that were interpreted to suggest that the U.S. was not committed to getting Iran to abandon its weapons program. Shamni said A/S Welch's comments on Iran during his recent visit reassured the GOI. He asked the Ambassador not to take strong remarks on Iran in the press attributed to Israeli politicians as serious, saying that this is political posturing to a public that takes defense issues seriously. He added, "There are very few real experts on defense issues in Israel. My boss is well known as one of them, and he is busy working." Shamni told the Ambassador, however, that he believes the U.S. could destroy Iran's nuclear weapons program in one air strike in a matter of hours, as long as it has accurate intelligence on where all the program's sites are located.

ON SYRIA, LEBANON: "BE CAREFUL NOT TO PUSH TOO HARD."

3. (C) In response to the Ambassador's questions, Shamni said that the IDF has not moved any additional forces to the northern border, and he has not seen any intelligence indicating that Hizballah is preparing strikes against Israel in the near future. Shamni reiterated the GOI's position that international pressure is working on Syria, but that the U.S. and others should be careful not to exert too much pressure on Syria's regime, lest it collapse. Commenting on the recent Hizballah incursions into Israel, Shamni said that they involved a platoon of at least 20-30 fighters.

COOPERATION WITH EGYPT BETTER, DRIVING TERRORISTS UNDERGROUND

4. (C) Shamni said that Israel's cooperation with Egypt is improving as a result of their joint efforts to stop terrorists from crossing the Egypt-Gaza border. As a result of the tightening up of the border, terrorists are being forced to attempt infiltration by sea, through tunnels, and across the Israel-Egypt border from the Sinai into the Negev desert. Shamni noted that in the previous week, three attempts to smuggle weapons and explosives into Israel by sea had been foiled. In two of the attempts, the smugglers were

killed. In the third attempt, two smugglers were caught. Shamni said that Palestinian security services told GOI officials that they had managed to drag up one of the smuggling bags that had sunk to the sea bottom, and determined that the bags contained explosives. Shamni said the Israeli Navy is discussing with the Palestinian Authority the idea of having the Palestinian coastal police patrol the shallow waters starting from the Egypt-Gaza border and running along the full length of Gaza.

15. (C) Shamni said the Egyptians need to do more to prevent infiltration across the Egypt-Israel border, or Israel may be forced to change its rules of engagement to deal with the threat of terrorist crossings. He stressed that Egypt and Israel are both worried about the growing presence of global jihadist terrorists in the Sinai. Without elaborating, Shamni claimed that Israeli security personnel witnessed a few attempts by suspected terrorists to cross from the Sinai into Israel's Negev desert. He observed that from the Negev, it is not too far for a terrorist to travel to reach the West Bank. Shamni added that on the morning of the day of his meeting with the Ambassador, the Egyptians caught six people trying to infiltrate Gaza from the Sinai. He said information so far indicates that one of the persons is a Palestinian Islamic Jihad member from northern Gaza.

16. (C) Regarding the IDF's recent discovery of an unfinished tunnel running from northern Gaza into Israel, Shamni said that Palestinian terrorists had dug such tunnels in the north before, but mainly to place and detonate explosives beneath Israeli outposts when the IDF was in the Gaza Strip. Otherwise, he said, tunnels were and are still being used mainly by smugglers for black market activity. He observed that digging and using tunnels was an expensive business, underscoring that the terrorists are willing and able to pay the price to execute their tasks. Shamni said the Egyptians do not seem willing to arrest the smugglers, and noted that Egyptian officials had recently "held a conference" with the smugglers and tried to convince them to stop their activity. Shamni asked, "Why didn't they arrest the smugglers right there?" The Ambassador stressed that opening more crossings between Gaza and Israel should take normal commercial activity away from the tunnel business, and make it easier to conclude that persons using tunnels are engaged in illegal activity.

ON GAZA-WEST BANK CONVOYS AND NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE PA

17. (C) Shamni said that the GOI is worried about possible terrorist incidents at the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza. Responding to the Ambassador's strong urging for the opening of three convoy routes linking Gaza and the West Bank, Shamni stressed that the GOI already decided to open one convoy route from Gaza to Targumiya as part of a feasibility study. If it works, then the GOI could consider opening other routes. Shamni emphasized that Israel cannot afford to have terrorist know-how and capabilities pass from Gaza into the West Bank. He noted that 10-12 Syrian experts on trajectory weapons had already been sighted in Gaza, and warned that such capabilities -- if employed by terrorists in the West Bank -- would put Israeli strategic targets at serious risk. Shamni said, "If the Palestinians in the West Bank are able to launch rockets from Judea and Samaria, such a threat will demand a totally different response from us. We cannot let it happen. If necessary, we will have the IDF stay in cities in Judea and Samaria. We cannot allow what has happened in Gaza to happen in the West Bank."

18. (C) Shamni said that Palestinian security forces could do more to stop terrorists -- beginning by shutting down "dual-use factories." He said that the security forces are well equipped and manned, and attributed their inactivity to a lack of will. Shamni suggested that recent arrests of suspected terrorists by PA security forces were carried out to get the U.S. to pressure Israel on the convoy issue, and noted that despite the arrests, Qassam launches have continued. Responding to the Ambassador's question, Shamni said Israeli officials have given PA security services the names of Qassam rocket operators, but the Palestinians have not arrested anybody. Shamni said that over two months ago, Israel gave to the Palestinian security services the names of the terrorist cell members who launched the recent suicide bombing attack in Netanya, and the security services did nothing: "We did not see any serious efforts on their part, and the outcome is the Netanya bombing."

BIO NOTES ON MGEN GADI SHAMNI

19. (S) MGEN Gadi Shamni was appointed as PM Sharon's military adviser on August 16, and assumed the post on September 25. He took over from MGEN Yoav Galant, who has been appointed commander of the IDF's Southern Command. In his new role, Shamni is privy to the political workings of PM Sharon's inner circle, although he is very reluctant to talk politics.

As a military professional, he advises the PM on military counterterrorism operations in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Prior to assuming his role as Military Adviser, Shamni served as the head of the IDF's Operations Directorate, Commander of IDF forces in Gaza, and Commander of the IDF Infantry and Paratroops Corps. Shamni has worked closely with Embassy Tel Aviv's DAO since the early 1990s, is reportedly pro-U.S., and approves of U.S. policy towards Israel. Politically conservative, he is suspicious of Arab countries and disapproves of U.S. aid to Egypt. Shamni graduated from the U.S. Army's Special Warfare Qualification Course in Fort Bragg, NC, and the Army War College in Carlisle Barracks, PA. As a result of an injury sustained in battle, Shamni speaks quietly and in a very low voice. Although physically not commanding, Shamni knows how to push and sustain a position, dodge attempts to draw out views, and maintain control of a conversation.

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